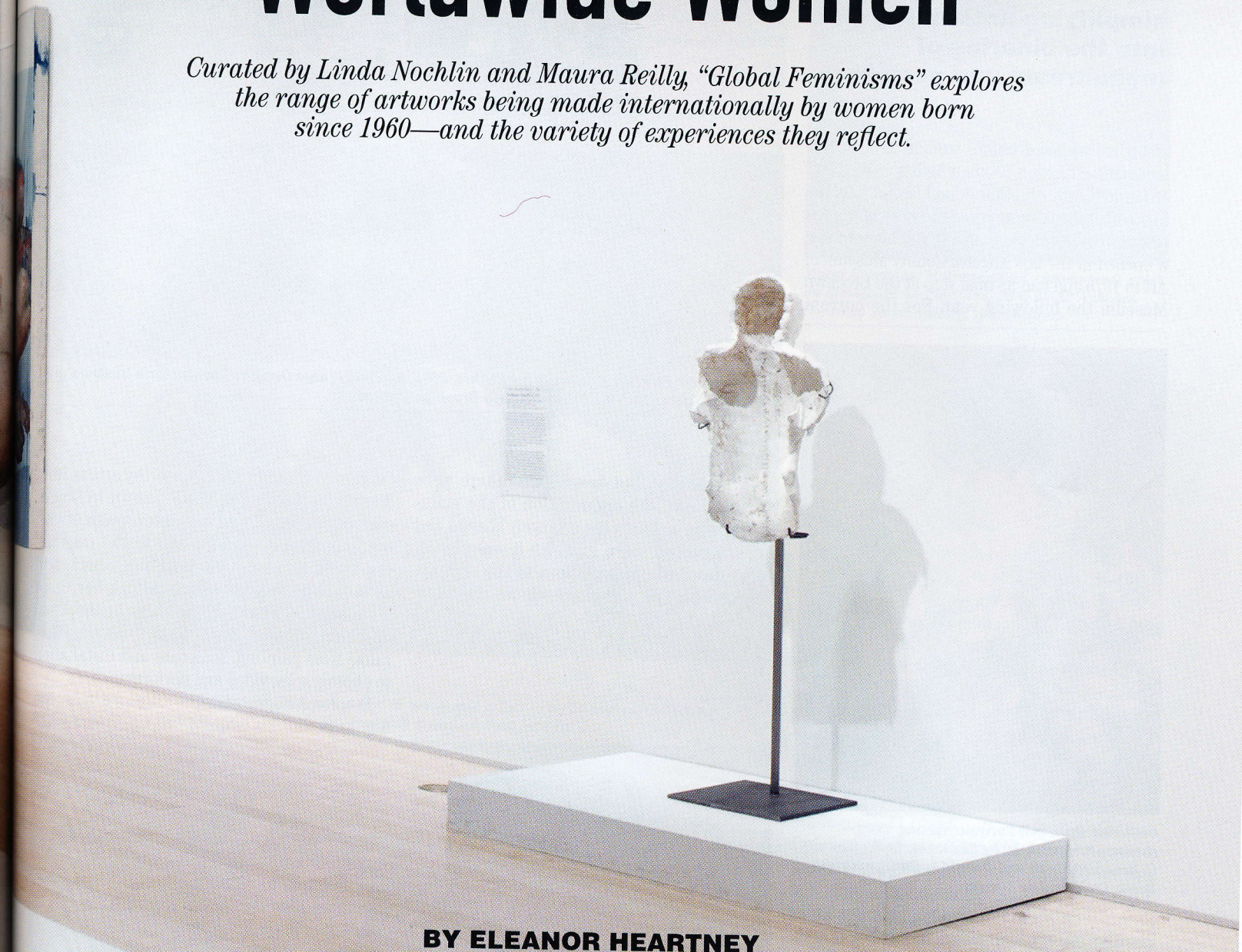
Worldwide Women

Curated by Linda Nochlin and Maura Reilly, "Global Feminisms" explores the range of artworks being made internationally by women born since 1960—and the variety of experiences they reflect.



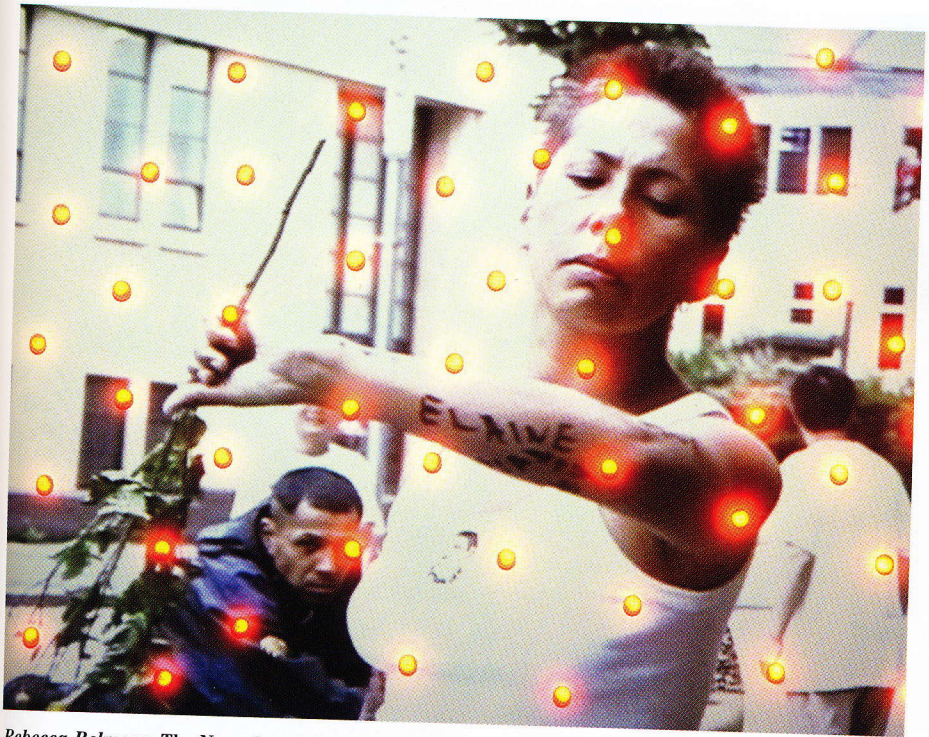
BY ELEANOR HEARTNEY

In a season rife with related events, the Brooklyn Museum's "Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art" is an eagerly anticipated component of a nationwide reevaluation of feminist art. It takes its place alongside the presentation of "WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution" at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, and the installation of Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (1974-79) and opening of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum, for which "Global Feminisms" acted as the opening salvo; there are also numerous panels, lectures and other activities around the country. While "WACK!" reviews the contributions of feminist artists in the late 1960s and '70s, "Global Feminisms" is meant to bring the story up to date with work by a generation of women artists born after 1960, and to represent the global sweep and diversification of the feminist art movement. As such, it was designed to appeal to a younger generation that has been resistant to the feminist label.

In the process, it promised a timely assessment of advances made and obstacles remaining, reflecting a climate in which it is no longer startling for a woman to curate a major international exhibition or appear as the subject of a solo show at a major museum. On the other hand, as the curators note in the hefty catalogue, women still lag far behind men in terms of representation in galleries, museums and international exhibitions, as well as price tags and sales at auctions.

The curatorial team for this project was intriguing—its senior member was Linda Nochlin, whose 1971 essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" sounded a clarion call for a reconsideration of the institutional obstacles

Exhibition view of Wangechi Mutu's Try Dismantling the Little Empire Inside of You, *2007, mixed mediums on Mylar on wall, with works by Berni Searle (left) and Tracey Rose (right). Photo courtesy Sikkema Jenkins & Co., New York, and Susanne Vielmetter Projects, Los Angeles.*



Rebecca Belmore: The Named and the Unnamed, *2002, video projection with lightbulbs, approx. 7¼ by 8¾ feet. Photo Howard Ursuliak, courtesy Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery, University of British Columbia, Vancouver.*

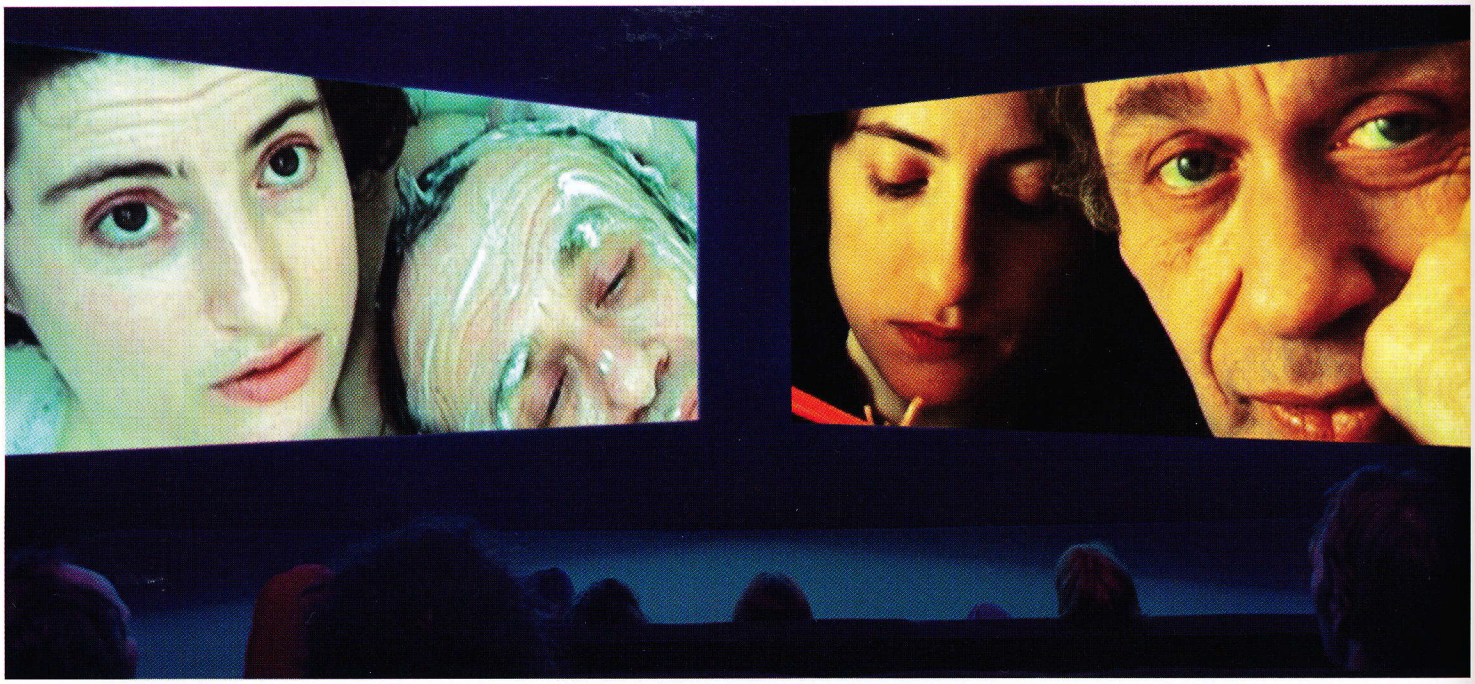
side, and is marginally more feminist; it presents the bloody marks a barbed-wire hula hoop leaves on the torso of a naked woman, whose actions are explained in the catalogue as references to the geographic barrier between Palestine and Israel.

Other works here deal with oppression directed more specifically at women. Iranian artist Parastou Forouhar has covered one wall of the gallery with wallpaper featuring tiny stylized images of women being flogged, hanged, stoned, beaten and otherwise tortured, one assumes, in the name of sharia. Canadian artist Rebecca Belmore's *The Named and the Unnamed* (2002) is an installation documenting a performance memorializing 50 women, many of them sex workers, who disappeared and remain missing in Vancouver. Projected on a wall studded with small lightbulbs that seem to function like votive candles is a video of the artist performing various ritualistic actions on urban streets, under the gaze of curious onlookers. In a related homage to the often invisible victims of AIDS and sex trafficking in Thailand, Skowmon Hastanan has covered a wall with a lightbox collage in which images of alluring hostesses in traditional Thai dress are

set within bubbles referring to the blood corpuscles and pharmaceutical capsules that are central to AIDS infection and treatment.

Several artists also incorporate the female body into works dealing with nationalism. Congolese artist Michèle Magema presents a two-channel video, one channel of which is documentary black-and-white footage of young girls marching in parades under the eye of dictator Mobutu Sese Seko, who ruled the country from 1965 to 1997; the other channel is a video of the artist in a blue shift with white stripe, marching in place to military music. In Russian artist Zoulikha Bouabdellah's video *Let's Dance (Dansons)*, 2003, by contrast, the female body subverts nationalistic cant, rather than serving as an instrument of propaganda. Here, the camera pulls in close as a woman winds a spangled belly-dancing outfit in the colors of the French flag around her waist, and proceeds to shake seductively to the strains of "La Marseillaise." Bouabdellah, who was raised in Algeria before moving to France, refers in this video to the problematics of ethnic and political identity in her adopted country.

The last section, "Emotions," seems almost an afterthought—a catch-all for works that didn't fit elsewhere. The rationale given is that the material here was chosen to demonstrate how women artists self-consciously parody conventional ideas about female emotionalism. The piece that most closely fills this bill is Australian artist Tracey Moffatt's hilarious video *Love* (2003), a compilation of quick cuts from Hollywood movies in which both men and women behave emotionally, and badly, succumbing to sexual passion, arguing, pulling weapons and finally killing each other. By contrast, real-life emotions are the subject of an hour-long video by Julia Loktev that analyzes and acts out the complexities of her relationship with her partner, Vito Acconci. More of a stretch are works like Shahzia Sikander's delicate updated Persian miniatures, Ghada Amer's sex-themed embroidery and Costa Rican artist Priscilla Monge's *Room for Isolation and Restraint* (2000), a small room padded with sanitary napkins.



Julia Loktev:* Rough House, *2001, two-channel video installation, 56 minutes.

Skowmon Hastanan:* Les femmes en route: Magnificent Journey *(detail), 2003, lightbox with cutouts on Plexiglas sheets, 11⅝ by 55 by 4¼ inches.